

MONEY AND POLITICS

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP THAT MAKES WASHINGTON WORK

Money and politics go hand in hand. Legislative changes, regulatory decisions, priorities for public spending, who pays how much in taxes—all can have billion-dollar impacts.

For tens of thousands of businesses, unions and other organized interests, influencing decision-makers in Washington, DC, is crucial—and they spend a combined hundreds of millions of dollars on elections to do so.

Given that the Congress of the United States has the final say on virtually every aspect of the activities of the U.S. Postal Service, as well as on the compensation and benefits of postal employees, letter carriers have more at stake in American politics than just about any other group of workers in the country. We have no choice but to be political players.

While most Americans agree that there is too much money in politics and that too much money can corrupt our political system, there is little agreement on how to finance our elections. Public financing has a lot of support within the labor movement, but powerful interests have blocked all attempts at campaign finance reform and, as we will see below, federal judges have often intervened to stop even modest measures to limit the influence of moneyed interests.

So we must participate in the system as it is, even as we work with our brothers and sisters in organized labor to make reforms that protect our democracy.

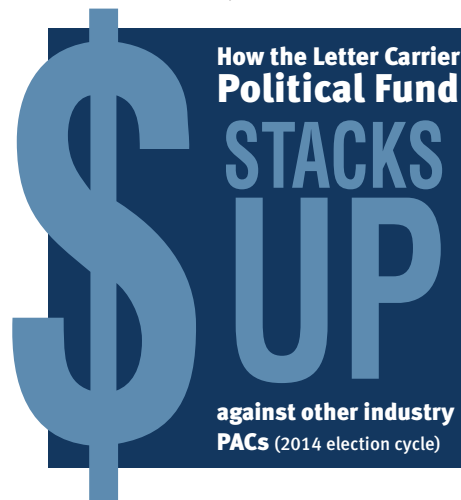
JUMPING IN

The Letter Carrier Political Fund is NALC's primary tool for effective political participation. Indeed, under federal law, the union cannot—and

does not—use union dues for election spending. Thanks to the Political Fund, NALC has the resources to support political allies from both parties in all parts of the country.

from paying for advertising that mentioned a candidate for political office in the weeks leading up to an election.

But six years later, one such organization—a group known as Citizens



NALC: \$6.4 million

UPS: \$4.4 million

FedEx: \$2.7 million

APWU: \$1.5 million

NRLCA: \$1.3 million

NAPS: \$386,734

NPMHU: \$372,676

NAPUS: \$402,802

Over the years, NALC has supported hundreds of candidates from both parties, from Rep. David Joyce (R-OH) to Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-VT). We have had great success in protecting our collective-bargaining rights, our pensions and our health benefits, as well as the long-term viability of USPS. But the world of campaign finance is changing rapidly, and letter carriers will need to do better than ever for NALC to remain politically strong.

“The political game has become quite complicated in recent years,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said, “since anyone on Capitol Hill can be targeted easily by deep-pocketed billionaires and others who have access to massive networks of political contributors.”

It wasn't always this way.

The 2002 McCain-Feingold Act was passed to prevent organizations such as political action committees (PACs)

United—filed suit to challenge the constitutionality of McCain-Feingold on free-speech grounds.

Bankrolled by billionaire conservatives Charles and David Koch (commonly referred to simply as the Koch brothers), Citizens United's case made it all the way to the Supreme Court, and in 2010, the court declared McCain-Feingold unconstitutional. The ruling interpreted the First Amendment to protect not just speech by itself, but spending on political speech as well, a ruling that tipped the political scales in favor of the rich and powerful.

Then a few months after the *Citizens United* decision, a federal court ruling in a separate case allowed for the creation of organizations commonly called “super PACs,” groups that are permitted to raise and spend as much money as possible to support or oppose candidates for political office.



A traditional PAC such as our Letter Carrier Political Fund, meanwhile, still must limit its contributions to no more than \$5,000 per year to a given candidate for political office (i.e., no more than \$10,000 per two-year election cycle).

Super PACs also differ from traditional political action committees in that super PACs are not allowed to give money directly to candidates. And although super PACs must report their spending to the Federal Election Commission (FEC), they are not required to disclose the sources of their contributions—whereas traditional PACs must do so.

As we've seen, it didn't take long for these super PACs to begin to build and flex their political muscles. For example, during the 2012 elections—where a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate hung in the balance—*The Washington Post* noted that no candidate running for re-election (excluding President Barack Obama) faced more opposition by outside groups than Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH). By April of that year, more than \$5.1 million had been spent in the battleground Buckeye State on television ads opposing Brown, a long-time friend of letter carriers and the larger labor movement. *The Post* cited figures such as \$2.7 million from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and another \$1.4 million from an anti-Obamacare PAC, with millions more coming from organizations such as Crossroads GPS (led by Republican power broker Karl Rove) as well as from a PAC managed by the conservative Concerned Women for America.

Thanks to letter carrier contributions to the Political Fund, NALC was able to pay to have activists released to work on grassroots campaigns across Ohio

to recruit huge numbers of neighborhood-canvassers, phone-bankers and other volunteers to help get out the vote for the state's labor-friendly senator—an arduous effort that proved successful despite the millions of dollars coming from the opposition: Brown won, with a little over half of the vote.

“As Ohio showed us in 2012, it's more important than ever for letter carriers to pay attention to what's going on in all levels of government,” Rolando said. “Moving forward, we will all be called upon to do all that we can to help our allies. And if you think it's hard to do now, buckle up: It's only going to get harder.”

“The Brown campaign and several others have proved that money doesn't just talk these days,” the president said. “Money also mobilizes voters by supporting the get-out-the-vote work of letter carriers who serve as political releases on the ground. And as natural organizers who already touch every address in the country at least six days a week, more often than not we're called up to take the lead in targeted grassroots efforts to get out the vote.”

Our challenge in 2016 and beyond is indeed great, Rolando said. “Through the Letter Carrier Political Fund, letter carriers still have a strong voice on Capitol Hill. But with super PACs gaining strength every day, not even the ‘safest’ congressional seat is truly safe.

“Our friends will continue to lean harder than ever on activists like us for support, this year and beyond,” he said. “Similarly, we will need all the support we can get from these allies on the Hill, as letter carriers and the larger labor movement continue to face seemingly never-ending threats to our collective-bargaining rights as well as to our well-deserved pay and benefits.” **PR**

Super PACs

by the numbers

2014 financial activity:

1,360

number of super PACs

\$696 million

total raised by super PACs

\$345 million

total spent by super PACs

2016 financial activity (so far):

1,854

number of super PACs

\$321 million

total raised by super PACs

\$111 million

total spent by super PACs

Source: Open Secrets